

Subject: Re: Request 2025-FSA-08431-F - Bocinsky - Additional Clarification Needed
Date: Monday, August 11, 2025 at 10:08:13 Mountain Daylight Time
From: Bocinsky, Kyle
To: SM.FPAC.BC.FOIA
CC: Vander Linden, Christina - FPAC-FBC, MO, Nagel, Carol - FPAC-FBC, ND, Nguyen, Hani - FPAC-FBC, MN
Attachments: image002.png

Hi. Thank you for this feedback, and for the opportunity to clarify my request.

The program owner states, "FSA and the USDM use a tabular file of counties, states, and grazing periods established for specific pasture types in conjunction with *drought data received from the USDM by physical state and county*, no boundary files are used" (emphasis added). The authoritative US Drought Monitor product is a set of geospatial vector polygons delimiting which parts of the US are in various levels of drought, from "D0" to "D4". Someone must perform a spatial intersection of the USDM polygons and county polygons to create the tabular data to which the program owner referred. The program owner mentioned the display of the data once eligibility is determined, but that is not what I'm looking for (though I'm glad to hear they are now using the US Census boundaries).

It sounds like it is the case that the FSA is having the folks at the National Drought Mitigation Center (which coordinates the USDM) assess which counties spatially intersect those polygons. If that is the case, I have three requests for the program owner:

1. Please provide me with an official statement that the FSA indeed receives only tabular data from the USDM. How long has this been the case? Please provide any guidance given to USDM about how county-level data are to be produced from the authoritative USDM product. If there are FSA policy or procedure documents that indicate this is how USDM data are received, please direct me to them.
2. Please contact the USDM and request the geospatial county boundary data used for the county drought determinations, including how those data have changed through time and any computer scripts or protocols used when making that determination. My goal is to precisely know the county boundary data used for county-level drought status every week going back to the 2008 program year. These spatial data, which are essential to determining eligibility, ought to be archived in a publicly available data repository and/or reachable via FOIA. Please provide me those data; if the FSA or USDM are unable or unwilling to provide those data, please provide me with a clear written statement explaining why those data are unavailable or cannot be provided to me.
3. Please provide me the raw data provided by the USDM to the FSA, from 2008 – present, in whatever format those data were/are provided to the FSA.

Thank you so much and let me know if further clarification is needed! I'm happy to chat on the phone with you or the LFP program owner.

Best,
Kyle

Kyle Bocinsky, PhD

Director of Climate Extension, Montana Climate Office, University of Montana
Asst. Research Professor, Society and Conservation, University of Montana

The University of Montana acknowledges that we are in the aboriginal territories of the Salish and Kalispel people. We honor the path they have shown us in caring for this place for the generations to come.

From: SM.FPAC.BC.FOIA <SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov>

Date: Monday, August 11, 2025 at 09:20

To: Bocinsky, Kyle <kyle.bocinsky@umontana.edu>, SM.FPAC.BC.FOIA
<SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov>

Cc: Vander Linden, Christina - FPAC-FBC, MO <christina.vanderlinden@usda.gov>, Nagel, Carol - FPAC-FBC, ND <carol.nagel@usda.gov>, Nguyen, Hani - FPAC-FBC, MN
<hani.nguyen@usda.gov>

Subject: Request 2025-FSA-08431-F - Bocinsky - Additional Clarification Needed

Dr. Bocinsky,

The program owner needs additional clarification as to what data you are looking for. Here is what the program owner is saying:

This request is a bit perplexing for me, because I don't think the requestor understands that process FSA uses for LFP eligibility.

FSA does not use a county boundary to determine LFP eligibility. FSA and the USDM use a tabular file of counties, states, and grazing periods established for specific pasture types in conjunction with drought data received from the USDM by physical state and county, no boundary files are used.

FSA uses a county boundary layer to display the counties that have already been determined eligible based on USDM data and are on the tabular list of eligible counties provided by policy. The county boundary FSA uses to display the eligible counties is based off of U.S. Census data. FSA can provide that county boundary layer used I want to emphasize that that boundary layer is not used in the process for determining LFP eligibility.

We cannot proceed further with your request until we receive additional written clarification from you. Please note that if we do not hear from you within 20 business days from the date of this email, we will assume that you are no longer interested in pursuing your request and we will administratively close your request.

If you have any questions regarding the processing of this request, please contact Government Information (GI) Specialist Christina Vander Linden at 816-823-2669. If GI Specialist Christina Vander Linden at 816-823-2669 is not available, please contact GI Specialist Hani Nguyen at 651-602-7848 or GI Specialist Carol Nagel at 701-530-2107. We can also be reached at the group e-mail address SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

Patrick McLoughlin

Patrick McLoughlin

FOIA OFFICER

FPAC-BC External Affairs Division | FOIA Team

p: (202) 590-6168

Patrick.mcloughlin@usda.gov / FOIA Team e: SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

From: SM.FPAC.BC.FOIA <SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov>

Sent: Thursday, July 17, 2025 8:58 AM

To: kyle.bocinsky@umontana.edu; SM.FPAC.BC.FOIA <SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov>

Cc: Vander Linden, Christina - FPAC-FBC, MO <christina.vanderlinden@usda.gov>; Nagel, Carol - FPAC-FBC, ND <carol.nagel@usda.gov>; Nguyen, Hani - FPAC-FBC, MN <hani.nguyen@usda.gov>

Subject: Request 2025-FSA-08431-F - Bocinsky - Clarified

Dr. Bocinsky,

You have clarified your request to be for *“the county boundaries used to create the county-level eligibility data — in a geospatial file format such as an ESRI ShapeFile, GeoJSON, or similar, based on the criteria described in my request. These county boundaries are used in conjunction with the normal grazing periods (provided to me via FOIA 2025-FSA-04691-F) and US Drought Monitor weekly assessments to create the county/grazing land eligibility data (provided to me via FOIA 2025-FSA-04690-F). Because of how county boundaries may be different depending on the dataset and vintage used, it is necessary to have access to the precise county boundary data used in every determination.”*

Your request is being handled under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552 (<http://www.usdoj.gov/oip/amended-foia-redlined.pdf>).

We process requests on a first-in, first-out basis. The actual processing time will depend upon the complexity of the request and whether or not it involves sensitive or voluminous records, or extensive searches and/or consultations. We also process requests on a multi-track basis. This means that simple requests, requiring minimal effort to respond, are processed in one track, and more voluminous and complex requests are processed in another track. We have placed your request in the Simple track.

Request 2025-FSA-08431-F is perfected and has been moved from pending into the Simple processing track. This request has been placed in the “Educational Use” Request Category and all fees will be waived.

The estimated date upon which we expect to provide you the requested records is on or before: August 14, 2025.

If you have questions concerning this request, please contact Government Information (GI) Specialist Christina Vander Linden at 816-823-2669. If GI Specialist Christina Vander Linden is not available, please contact GI Specialist Carol Nagel at 701-530-2107 or GI Specialist Hani Nguyen at 651-602-7848. We can also be reached at the group e-mail address SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov.

I appreciate the opportunity to assist you in this matter.

Sincerely,

Patrick McLoughlin

Patrick McLoughlin

FOIA Officer

FPAC-BC External Affairs Division | FOIA Team

FOIA Team e: SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

From: Bocinsky, Kyle <kyle.bocinsky@umontana.edu>

Sent: Wednesday, July 16, 2025 9:09 AM

To: SM.FPAC.BC.FOIA <SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov>

Cc: Vander Linden, Christina - FPAC-FBC, MO <christina.vanderlinden@usda.gov>; Nagel, Carol - FPAC-FBC, ND <carol.nagel@usda.gov>; Nguyen, Hani - FPAC-FBC, MN <hani.nguyen@usda.gov>

Subject: Re: Request 2025-FSA-08431-F - Bocinsky - Acknowledgement / Clarification

Good morning,

Thank you so much for the quick response. I think there is some confusion about what I'm requesting. I am not requesting producer- or field-level data. Instead, I'm requesting the county boundaries used to create the county-level eligibility data, based on the criteria described in my request. These county boundaries are used in conjunction with the normal grazing periods (provided to me via FOIA 2025-FSA-04691-F) and US Drought Monitor weekly assessments to create the county/grazing land eligibility data (provided to me via FOIA 2025-FSA-04690-F). Because of how county boundaries may be different depending on the dataset and vintage used, it is necessary to have access to the precise county boundary data used in every determination.

Happy to have a call with you about this if it is still unclear.

Thank you!

Best,

Kyle

Kyle Bocinsky, PhD

Director of Climate Extension, [Montana Climate Office, University of Montana](#)
Asst. Research Professor, [Society and Conservation, University of Montana](#)

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We honor the path they have shown us in caring for this place for the generations to come.*

From: SM.FPAC.BC.FOIA <SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov>

Date: Wednesday, July 16, 2025 at 07:30

To: Bocinsky, Kyle <kyle.bocinsky@umontana.edu>, SM.FPAC.BC.FOIA
<SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov>

Cc: Vander Linden, Christina - FPAC-FBC, MO <christina.vanderlinden@usda.gov>, Nagel,
Carol - FPAC-FBC, ND <carol.nagel@usda.gov>, Nguyen, Hani - FPAC-FBC, MN
<hani.nguyen@usda.gov>

Subject: Request 2025-FSA-08431-F - Bocinsky - Acknowledgement / Clarification

Mr. Bocinsky,

This letter acknowledges receipt of your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request (copy attached) dated July 15, 2025, to the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Production and Conservation Business Center (FPAC-BC). Your request was received in this office and assigned control number 2025-FSA-08431-F. Please use this control number for all future communications regarding this request.

We are unable to begin processing your request at this time because we cannot determine precisely which records you are seeking. In your request form, you state that you are requesting

" official geospatial county boundaries — in a geospatial file format such as an ESRI ShapeFile, GeoJSON, or similar — that were used to determine eligibility for the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) for each program year (2008–2025). "

However, we need to know do you or your university have a memorandum of understanding with the USDA to receive these data points without producer consent? If yes, please provide us a copy by replying to this email.

We cannot proceed further with your request until we receive additional written clarification from you. Please note that if we do not hear from you within 20 business days from the date of this email, we will assume that you are no longer interested in pursuing your request and we will administratively close your request.

If you have any questions regarding the processing of this request, please contact Government Information (GI) Specialist Christina Vander Linden at 816-823-2669. If GI Specialist Christina Vander Linden at 816-823-2669 is not available, please contact GI Specialist Hani Nguyen at 651-602-7848 or GI Specialist Carol Nagel at 701-530-2107. We can also be reached at the group e-mail address SM.FP.FOIA@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

Patrick McLoughlin

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FOIA OFFICER

FPAC-BC External Affairs Division | FOIA Team

p: (202) 590-6168



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